

Students build gazebo the hard way; Borah teens learn age-old methods, gain self-confidence

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They probably could have built a gazebo faster if they had used modern conveniences like screws, nails, bolts and a power tools.

But that wasn't the point for students enrolled in Borah High School's architectural design class. They undertook a far greater challenge. They built a 10-by-10-foot gabled roof gazebo the way people did in the early middle ages: by timberframing, which uses wooden pegs, the structure's own weight and beams of wood locked into mortises to hold it together.

"This gazebo could outlast the school," said Leigh Killingbeck, 18, who spent much of last year designing the structure in the classroom.

About 22 kids from Scott Larson's architectural design class have spent part of their school week working on the gazebo since September.

Alex Parenti, 16, used a wooden mallet and a chisel recently to hone out mortises that will hold whole beams of wood.

"I've never built anything this big before," he said.

He didn't know how complicated constructing a structure could be. He thought most projects like this were all factory-built.

Until now, most projects in Larson's class were completed indoors, and on a scale that would be easy to move around.

But as Killingbeck worked on designing the gazebo, he and Larson hit on the idea of trying to actually build it.

They received about \$4,000 in grants to cover the costs. The students put in sweat equity.

The effort pulls the gazebo out of the design phase and into the real-world construction, "so they can see how it works," Larson said. "They make connections between designing and building."

The wood is Douglas fir from Garden Valley.

Students are learning some history of construction, the beauty of a timber-framed structure and a way to build that many consider an art.

"You learn about how old people did it," said Jared Weatherspoon, 17.

The gazebo, on the south part of campus, should be done by Christmas. It will likely become a place for kids to hang out at lunch.

The kids who built it will know it was their chiseling, their work, that created the place for kids to grab a break between classes.

And they will get something larger out of it.

"The big thing is self-confidence," said Larson.

Blake Lawatch, 16, chisels the mortise — the hole — where a tenon will fit. "If I had built this, I wouldn't have thought about half the stuff we're doing," Lawatch said. "I would have used nails everywhere."